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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Pioneer and Historical Society

OF

PICKAWAY COUNTY,

BY

ALFRED WILLIAMS.

Published by request of the Society.

CIRCLEVILLE, OHIO:

PRINTED BY VAN CLEAF & DRESBACH, BOOK & JOB PRINTERS.

1873.

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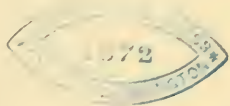
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ADDRESS.

I PROPOSE to speak of the character of the work which this Association has before it as a Historical Society. The old ideas of the dignity of history have recently given place to more enlightened and practical views. The state of society, even as to the minor details of the every day life of all classes of people are considered no less interesting than the ambitious schemes of kings, or the cunning intrigues of diplomatists. Lord Macaulay in his incomparable essay on history first developed the principles of this new school of historical writing, of which he afterwards furnished so successful and brilliant an example in his admirable history of England. He demonstrated that history could be truthfully and impartially written so as to make the narrative no less attractive and absorbing than the highest order of fiction, or poetry. Thus the stately old folios over which our fathers yawned, have given place to pleasing volumes filled with vivid pictures of the daily life of the people in the ages gone by, whereby we are enabled to

realize that they were men like ourselves, of like virtues and faults, hopes and fears. The true philosophy of history must be sought in the hearts and lives of the people, not in the tomes of artificial diplomatic correspondence, or in books which detail the fortunes of dynasties. The permanency of free institutions rests upon the principle that there is in human society a perpetually progressive tendency, and that all the political, social and moral revolutions of the world inevitably promote the elevation of humanity. This development is of course best traced in the homely but important facts and events of common life which is the duty of associations like this to collect and record.

This association is called the Pioneer and Historical Society. It seems therefore to have a two-fold object:

1st. The collection of materials for the historian.

2nd. The promotion of social intercourse among the pioneers of the county.

The historical work of the Society is important and for the reason that there is perhaps no other county in the State which possesses more interesting materials for the historian. The Scioto Valley was evidently always a favorite dwelling place for the Indians, as well as for that more ancient, mysterious people who preceded them. In this connection it would perhaps be proper for us to express our regret, if not our indignation, at the action of the founders of Circleville, by which the most interesting ancient works upon this continent were obliterated. If the ground occupied by those works

had been set apart for a park, and the town laid out at a suitable distance therefrom, they might have been preserved and would have rendered this locality one of unusual interest to the tourists and antiquarians of all the world. Since, however, they have been destroyed it might be well for this Society to cause a proper topographical survey to be made in order that the outlines of those works may be marked by such monuments, as will enable future generations to know where the famous circle and square once stood.

It would probably not be expedient for this Society to enter into inquiries as to who the mound builders were, whence they came, and in what age they occupied these fertile plains. The subject is dark, unknown, and mysterious and will probably always so remain.

The history of the Indians who occupied this territory immediately before it was settled by our pioneer ancestors, will, I suppose, constitute a proper subject for the investigations of this Society. The subject while not wanting in poetical interest, suggests also deep questions of philosophy. The Indian uncorrupted and undebased by the vices of civilization, contrasted with the ancient Greek, is in many respects similar to him, the noblest type of mankind yet produced. Take for example the Shawanoese account of the origin of the Piqua Tribe, from whom our county derives its name. The tradition as related to Col. Johnson was, that once upon a time the whole Shawanoese Tribe were assembled at a solemn religious feast. They were

all seated around a large fire which having nearly burnt down, a great puffing and blowing was suddenly observed among the embers, when behold! a man of majestic form and god-like mien issued forth from the ashes. Hence the name Piqua; a man made of ashes. This was the first man of the Piqua Tribe. This Indian tradition certainly equals in interest and dignity any of those related of the gods and heroes of ancient Greece, and indicates that the race possessed a poetic fancy, joined to such religious conceptions as would in course of time have produced a sublime and beautiful mythology. Their minds were full of the images of poetry, and had they possessed a written language, they could have given to the world the elements of a noble literature. Such a language they would no doubt have ultimately possessed had not their development been cut short by the discovery of America, and the incursion of Europeans which followed.

The authentic modern history of our county may be said to begin with the celebrated expedition of Lord Dunmore in the year 1774, against the Indians on the Scioto. Lord Dunmore, the last royal governor of the commonwealth of Virginia, has been uniformly, so far as I know, spoken of by American writers as a wicked and corrupt man. It seems probable that great injustice has been done to his character as a statesman and a citizen. The colonists under the influence of the excitement growing out of the revolutionary movements of that period, charged him with having formed a secret alliance

with the Indians to assist Great Britain in the impending war. The charge was repeated by Charles Whittlesey in his address before the historical and philosophical society of Ohio at Columbus, in 1840, and has ever since been received as an established historical fact. I have, through the kindness of Gen. Schenck, the American minister at London, been furnished with full copies of the dispatches of Lord Dunmore to the English government, containing a detailed account of the origin, progress, and execution of the campaign against the Scioto Indians. These private, confidential dispatches contain no intimation of any design, or desire even upon the part of Lord Dunmore to form any alliance with the Indians against the colonists. On the contrary, his confidential report to his government establishes the fact that he acted in the utmost good faith, and honestly labored for the promotion of the prosperity of the colony of which he was governor.

Mr. Bancroft, in his history of the United States, has probably done very great injustice to the character of Lord Dunmore. I use the word probably for the reason that it would be very improper to make a positive charge until Mr. Bancroft has had an opportunity of vindicating the correctness of his narrative.

In Vol. VII, page 161, Mr. Bancroft says :

“ No royal governor showed more rapacity in the use of
“ official power than Lord Dunmore. He had reluctantly left
“ New York, where during his short career he had acquired fifty
“ thousand acres of land, and himself acting as chancellor, was
“ preparing to decide in his own court, in his own favor, a large
“ and unfounded claim which he had preferred against the

“lieutenant governor. Upon entering upon the government of Virginia, his passion for land and fees, outweighing the proclamation of the King and reiterated and most positive instructions from the Secretary of State, he advocated the claims of the colony to the West, and was himself a partner in two immense purchases of land from the Indians in Southern Illinois. In 1773, his agents, the Bullets, made surveys at the falls of the Ohio, and a part of Louisville, and of the towns opposite Cincinnati, are now held under his warrant. The area of the Ancient Dominion expanded with his cupidity.”

Mr. Bancroft cites no authority whatever for the very grave charges which he makes against the character of Lord Dunmore. It appears, however, by Dunmore's correspondence, that charges of the character mentioned were made against him by John Penn, Governor of the province of Pennsylvania. It is moreover a well known fact that a bitter controversy took place between Penn and Dunmore as to the boundaries of their respective provinces. In this controversy Dunmore was but the mouthpiece of the people of Virginia. Of course the dispute was referred to the home government in England for settlement, each party endeavoring, as usual in such cases, to make the best showing possible. It appears that Governor Penn, in order to sustain his cause, made an attack upon the personal character of the Governor of Virginia, making substantially the charges contained in Bancroft. We may therefore conjecture that Bancroft must have founded his charges upon the statements of Governor Penn, which statements must have been made, as we shall see, under the influence of passion and prejudice.

Lord Dartmouth, the colonial Secretary, having

called the attention of Dunmore to the charge that he had illegally issued patents to himself for lands, he makes the following emphatic and pointed denial :

“ I have not in any manner, whatever, made a grant of land “ to myself, to any person of my family, or even to any friend “ or connection; or made a grant to any other person for my “ or their benefit, or been concerned in any scheme for obtaining “ land any how since I came to this government.”—*Page 9 of Lord Dunmore’s dispatch of Dec. 24, 1774.*

To sustain his denial he appends to his dispatch a detailed official report of all the patents issued by him, which official record sustains his statement. The following additional facts which I have ascertained through our fellow citizen, Col. Anderson, seem to confirm beyond dispute the statement of Dunmore. The original patentees of the land upon which Covington is built were John Connelly and James Welsh; the patentee of Newport was James Taylor, of Caroline county, Va. I have not been able to find any evidence to connect Dunmore in any manner with the ownership of those lands. On the contrary reliable information seemed to indicate that Bancroft was utterly mistaken. This may be another instance in which a malicious slander, devised for the gratification of personal spite has passed as truth into the solemn records of history to injury of a pure and upright man. In this connection it may be proper to remark that, if we may judge from the pure idiomatic English of his State papers, he was a man of scholarly culture as well as an enlightened and liberal statesman.

Another interesting subject connected with the history of our county is Logan's speech and the questions which have arisen in regard to its authenticity. The testimony is so conflicting as to render the satisfactory solution of the question a matter of great difficulty, especially as it involves the character for truthfulness of so eminent a statesman as Thomas Jefferson. As a literary and historical problem it possesses no less interest and dignity than the controversies which in times past have agitated the learned world in regard to the authenticity of the epistles of Phalaris, the poems of Ossian, or the authorship of the letters of Junius.

Such are some of the matters of general, and indeed we may say of national interest which may properly occupy the attention of the members of this society. Our chief work, however, will be to collect materials for a history of the settlement of the county. We must determine when and where the first settlements were made, the names of the first settlers, whence they came, and what traits of character they were noted for. We must also inquire who were the first professional men of the county, the first lawyers, physicians, teachers and ministers, and record anecdotes illustrating any peculiarities they may have possessed. We must inquire when and where the first churches and school houses were built; where the early courts were held; who the early county officers were; who were members of the Legislature, Congressmen, or filled other places of public trust. We must inquire who the early merchants were;

who were the leading mechanics and pioneer manufacturers ; when the first banks were established ; when and where the first mills were built ; the first roads were made ; what bridges were first built, and so all through the list of public improvements.

Nor must we neglect social statistics, and facts illustrating the daily life of the pioneers. Although human nature in its general characteristics remains forever the same, yet the dress, food, dwellings, furniture, equipage, arms, customs of society, amusements, festivities, language, laws, opinions, and even creeds and the solemn ceremonies of religion are perpetually changing. Hence it is that the past always possesses for mankind such a lively interest. Hence the pleasure with which we view relics of the past, whether those relics be the ruins of classical antiquity on the rude domestic implements, or ornaments of our pioneer ancestors. It is the faculty of well describing the dress, habits and customs of by-gone ages, that gives a great novelist his power, a power that increases just in proportion as the writer vividly and faithfully represents the manners and the sentiments of the men and women of the past. The picture must be true to nature, or the finest word painting will not prevent a story with a plot ever so well devised from being a failure. We all long for glimpses of the daily life of the old times. How intense has been the interest with which mankind have watched the disinterment of Herculaneum and Pompeii, because those cities were so suddenly overwhelmed that the domestic life of the inhabit-

ants was suddenly suspended, and petrified for our study. How many of the pages of stately Livy which describe the march of armies and the triumphs of the Senate and the Roman people would we not give for a description of the daily, social and domestic life of the Romans.

We, the grandsons of the pioneers, already regard with romantic interest, the scenes which they witnessed and were a part of. What would we not give to have thrown on a canvass before us to-day a photograph of the interior of a pioneer cabin, with its capacious fire place, the mellow light shed through the greased paper window, the bright pewter plates arrayed upon the clapboard shelves, the gun on hooks over the door, the spinning wheel, the three legged stool, the family partaking of the humble repast of johnny cake or mush and milk. How we would like to see the men of those days, the noble form of the hunter returning home laden with game, or of the stalwart axman under whose steady blows the sturdy oak has just fallen. Surely there is in pioneer life not less for the study of the artist than for the poet, the novelist, or the historian.

Turning to the social life of the pioneers we find that while it had hardships and dangers which only the determined and the brave could have endured, it had also its bright side in the warm and sincere hospitality and neighborly kindness which it developed. It was certainly reserved for American pioneer life to bring out to the fullest extent the most unselfish feelings of the human heart. While

we admire the religious enthusiasm of the Crusader who died cheerfully fighting to recover the Saviour's tomb, or the bravery of the Knight errant who in tournament or battle never turned back to a foe, we cannot the less esteem the American pioneer whose daily life was an illustration of the divine parable of the good Samaritan.

Not the least important object of this society is to promote social intercourse among the old citizens of the county, and to bring them together at stated periods and talk over the merry old times that are gone, for

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
“And never brought to mind?
“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
“And days o’ lang syne?”

The revered and venerable pioneers as they assemble on these joyous occasions will sadly miss many of the friends and companions of their early years who now sleep in honored graves. For some, too, there may be recollections of sickness and sorrow in the remote cabin, of father or mother, stricken down by death, making the wilderness home solitary and desolate indeed. For such

“Memory may be now but the tomb
“Of joys long past.”

Fortunately, however, the severest trials and misfortunes of life are soon softened and mellowed by time. Whatever the sorrows of the past may have been, the surviving pioneers may well rejoice

in the present, and look hopefully to the future. As they to-day behold the public improvements, the wealth, the intellectual culture and refinement which have given to this county so high a rank among those of the State, they may well conclude that their labors have not been in vain.





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